About University Presses

By PAUL FLOWERS

ON THREE separate fronts Memphis State College made impressive bids for recognition as the 1954 autumn came along; registration of students passed the 3,000 mark; the football team played to a standstill Tulane University's Green Wave; and the Memphis State College Press made its debut into the world of publishing with a collection of lectures by Claude G. Bowers. The book is reviewed on this page today by Walter Chandler.

With numerical gains and athletic prowess this department has little concern, but the Book Page of The Commercial Appeal congratulates Memphis State College on its new venture, and wishes for that venture a brilliant future of service to scholarship and literature.

THERE IS A WEALTH of material in West Tennessee, the area normally served by Memphis State College, that deserves publication in permanent form, and in this field the new press has a magnificent opportunity. In history, folklore, criticism, and social research, we possess untapped resources; the new press can perform almost limitless service by adopting a well planned program of presenting fruits of regional research and creative activity.

This conforms not only to precedents established by other institutions of higher learning in the South and elsewhere but also to the publicly stated aims of university publishing agencies long in the field.

AS STATED by managers of the 35 organizations represented in the Association of American University Presses, the publishing arm of an institution of higher learning should:

Extend the university's teaching and research beyond the classroom and laboratory, for the widest dissemination of tested knowledge.

Publish books that contribute to understanding of human affairs, whether in arts or the sciences.

Disseminate knowledge, not only among scholars, but also for the educated lay reader.

Encourage scholarship and research.

Enable staff members and others to publish works with complete freedom from dictation on the part of commercial publishers.

FOR MANY YEARS University of North Carolina Press has been a leader among university publishing enterprises; Louisiana State University Press has made its contribution most notably with the series of Southern biographies (three of them written by a former Memphian, Joseph H. Parks); and University of Oklahoma has specialized in historical items about the Southwest.

Many of the offerings from university presses have commanded wide popular interest and in some instances have issued books which challenged the best sellers.

Active university presses in the South include Duke, Georgia, Kentucky, South Carolina, University Press in Dallas (Southern Methodist), Emory, University of Tennessee, and others are not listed as members of the association, but even non-members have issued books which merit attention, especially in regional history and other fields.

"UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING in America had both English and German antecedents," says Chester Kerr's Report On American University Presses. American pioneers were Johns Hopkins, Chicago and Columbia Universities, although mentioned in early accounts are Cornell, and University of Pennsylvania.

By 1937 the university presses had multiplied and flourished to the extent that Norman Cousins, then literary editor of Current History, wrote:

". . . . It (development of the university presses) is probably the most notable development in publishing since the turn of the century."

SPEAKING OF WHAT he felt was a national sweep toward more solid reading, Dr. Henry Seidel Canby wrote in 1928:

"In this change of taste the university presses have had an honorable part. They have carried on where the university stopped. They have made possible the publication, and what is equally important, the distribution of those works of indispensable scholarship which by their very nature can circulate among the elect, and they have gone further and become sponsors for important books of an interest as great as their authority. . . . Their reputation throughout the reading world is already commemsurate with the universities that gave them birth."

J. Donald Adams of the New York Times, wrote:

"And so the university press, which came into being and is still being directed without the primary motive of profit which necessarily dominates every business, may find itself called on to be the guardian and protector of originality, of experiment, of all the values to which men give lip service until their pocketbooks are involved."